

Affordable Medicines Are Still Elusive: America's Families Want Fair Prices

Time and again, people in America recount the increasingly grim trade-offs they must make to afford health care. Today, one in every two people fears bankruptcy due to an unaffordable medical event.¹ For non-White adults, it is two in every three people. Economic hardships sparked by the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbate the impossible trade-offs families face: rent or food; food or medicine. Families are struggling to meet their basic needs and, in particular, face life-altering decisions about managing unaffordable medicines.

Even before the pandemic, the burden of high prescription drug costs was described as “financially toxic” to families in America.² In 2019, almost one in four people did not fill prescriptions, spent less on groceries, or took on more credit card debt due to rising drug costs.³

Now, medication affordability challenges are worse due to massive job losses during the pandemic, and the additional burden is disproportionately borne by people of color and those with the greatest need.⁴ The call for action is clear. Nearly nine in ten people are concerned that drug prices will continue to rise in response to COVID-19 and want the federal government to negotiate lower prices. Employers are equally concerned.⁵ Ninety percent of employers surveyed cite drug prices as the greatest threat to the affordability of employer-sponsored health insurance, and virtually all (94 percent) want some form of drug price regulation.⁶ Corporations and their shareholders are impervious to these concerns, as evidenced by notable price hikes in July (even among companies receiving billions of dollars in federal

support to develop and produce a COVID-19 vaccine),⁷ and investors eagerly await COVID-19-specific therapeutics.⁸

America's families are still waiting for the federal government to act to reduce the burden of the high cost of prescription drugs and to protect them from unrelenting price increases.⁹

In June, 2020 Hart Research Associates and Families USA completed a nationally representative survey of 1,203 voters across the country. This issue brief highlights recent polling that solidifies this mandate.

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Key takeaways from this polling include:

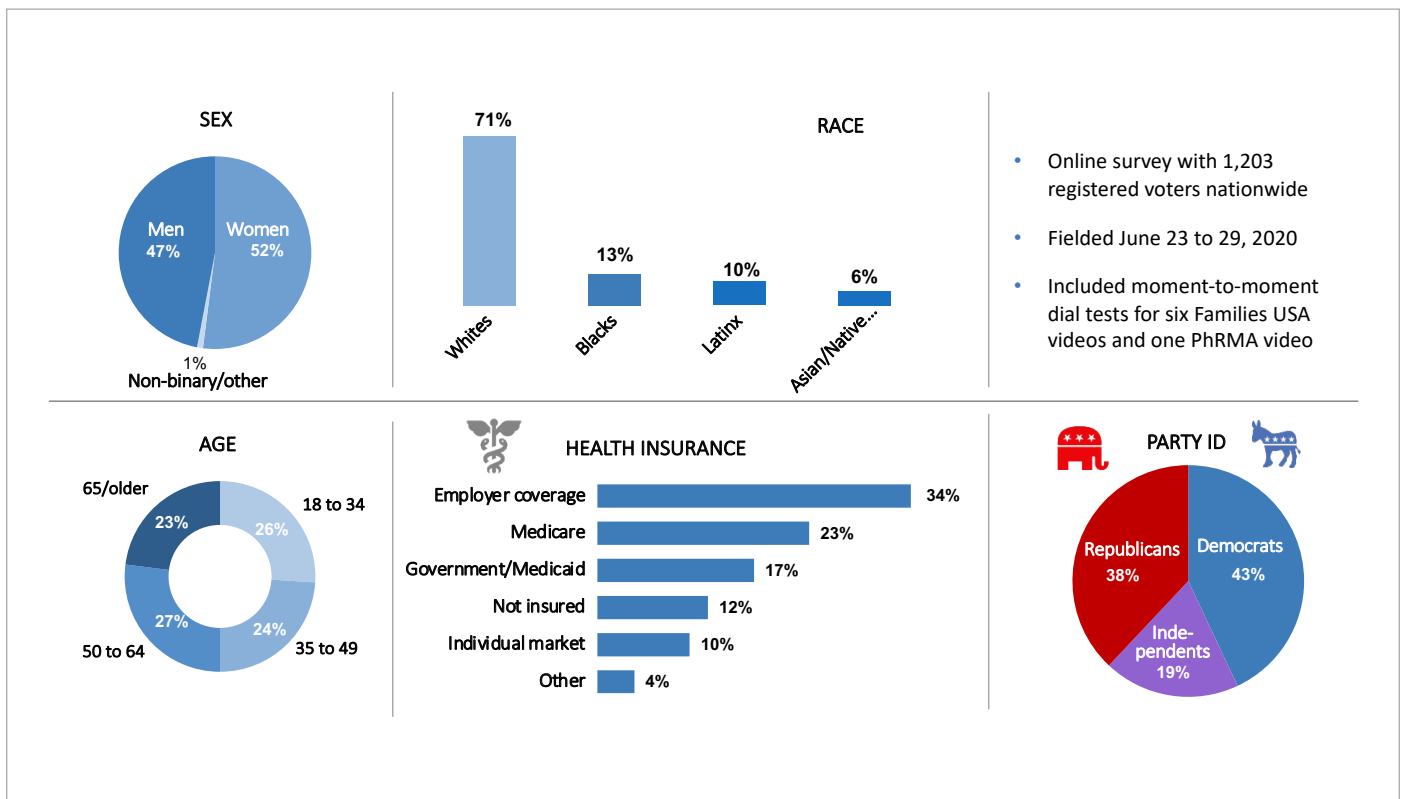
- » Reducing the cost of prescription drugs and putting a stop to excessive drug pricing is a powerful issue across the aisle.
- » Voters place high priority on congressional action to address high drug prices; there is overwhelming and bipartisan support for legislation to give Medicare the power to negotiate with drug companies for lower prices. This is true, even if respondents are not personally affected.

- » Videos that present the consumer perspective evoke the urgent need for congressional action much more than industry messages about innovation elicit caution.
- » There is overwhelming support across party lines for legislation that would cap the price of any COVID-19 vaccines or treatment developed with federal funding.

A breakdown of the 1,203 survey respondents by sex, race, age, and other characteristics is presented below.

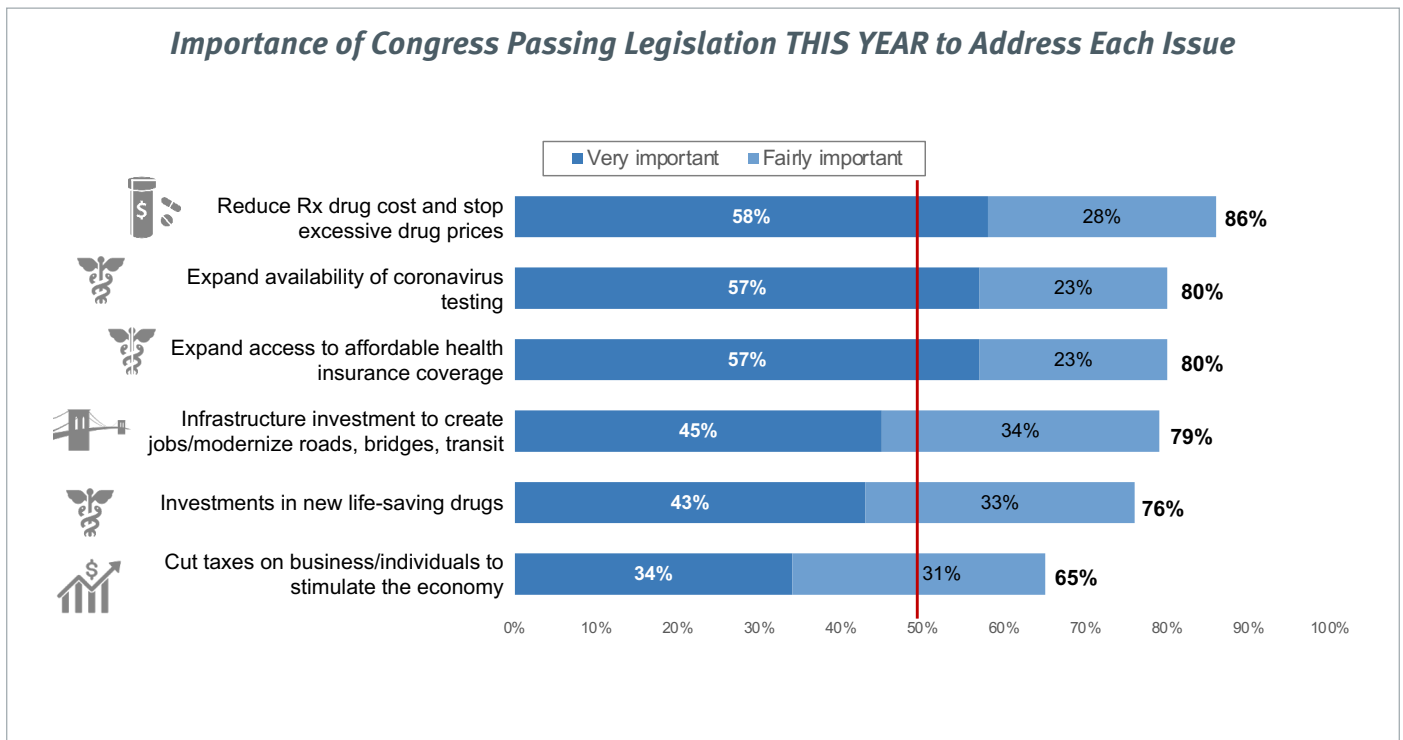
This survey was conducted by Hart Research Associates.

Characteristics of Survey Respondents



Detailed survey findings are presented below.

Voters' Three Most Urgent Priorities for Congress Center on Healthcare



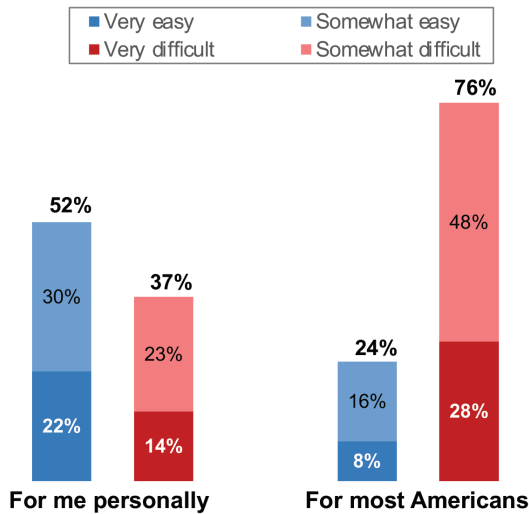
The Issue of Reducing the Cost of Prescription Drugs is Powerful Across the Aisle

VERY IMPORTANT for Congress to Pass Legislation THIS YEAR to Address Each Issue

	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
Reducing the cost of prescription drugs and stopping excessive drug prices	66%	52%	51%
Expanding the availability of coronavirus testing	72%	52%	41%
Expanding access to affordable health insurance coverage	71%	51%	43%
Investing in infrastructure projects to create jobs and modernize our roads, bridges, and transportation	46%	41%	46%
Ensuring investments in new life-saving drugs	49%	38%	38%
Cutting taxes on businesses and individuals to stimulate the economy	31%	32%	40%

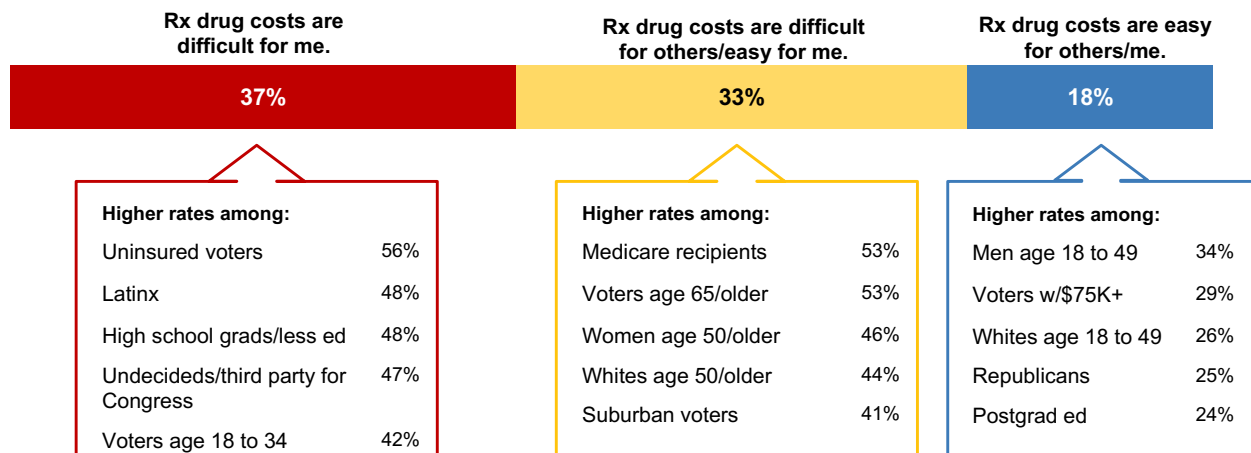
Even if the High Cost of Prescriptions Does Not Affect Them Personally, Voters Believe that it Is a Challenge for Other Americans

How difficult is it for you/most Americans to afford the cost of prescription medicine?



	Difficult for me personally	Difficult for most Americans
Men	37%	68%
Women	38%	82%
Age 18 to 34	42%	65%
Age 35 to 49	34%	65%
Age 50 to 64	43%	82%
Age 65/older	30%	90%
Whites	35%	78%
Blacks	41%	64%
Latinx	48%	72%
Democrats	40%	78%
Independents	42%	77%
Republicans	32%	72%

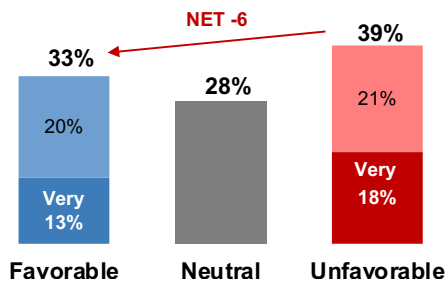
Voters Divide Into Three Groups on the Cost of Prescription Drugs



While Overall Feelings Toward Drug Companies Are Mixed, There's Widespread Agreement that Companies Charge Too Much for Prescription Drugs

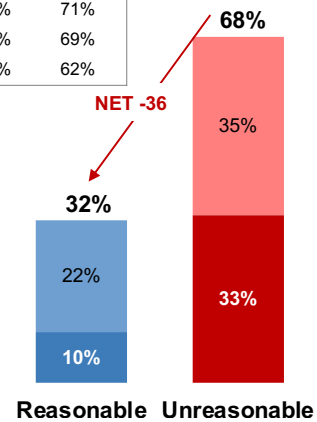
Overall Opinion of the Pharmaceutical Industry Today

	Fav	Unfav
Democrats	29%	44%
Independents	22%	42%
Republicans	43%	31%



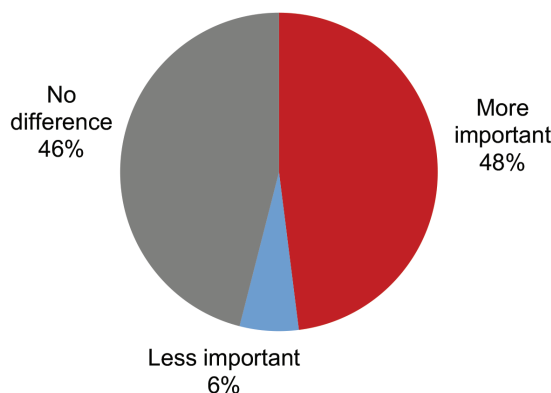
Assessment of Amount Pharmaceutical Companies Charge for Rx Drugs

	Reas	Unreas
Democrats	29%	71%
Independents	31%	69%
Republicans	38%	62%



If Anything, the Coronavirus Has Increased the Importance of High Prescription Costs, Including for Younger Voters Who Are not Traditionally as Affected by this Issue

Has the situation with the coronavirus made the issue of high prescription drug costs more important or less important to you?



Coronavirus has made the issue of Rx costs more important.

Age 18 to 34	59%
Age 35 to 49	48%
Age 50 to 64	43%
Age 65/older	43%
Whites	43%
Blacks	60%
Latinx	66%
Whites age 18 to 49	50%
Whites age 50/older	38%
VOCs age 18 to 49	59%
VOCs age 50/older	62%

There is Overwhelming and Bipartisan Consensus that Congress Should Act Now to Give Medicare the Power to Negotiate Directly with Drug Companies for Lower Prices

Support for Legislation to Lower Rx Drug Costs*



73% of voters favor the legislation and say Congress should make it a priority to pass the legislation THIS YEAR.

	Total favor	Strongly favor
Democrats	96%	70%
Independents	96%	54%
Republicans	93%	54%
Whites	95%	61%
Blacks	95%	60%
Latinx	97%	67%
Age 18 to 34	95%	49%
Age 35 to 49	95%	61%
Age 50 to 64	94%	61%
Age 65/older	96%	73%
Medicare recipients	95%	69%
Private insurance	96%	60%
Uninsured	98%	53%

*Description before question: "Congress is considering legislation to lower the cost of prescription drugs by giving Medicare the power to negotiate directly with drug companies for lower prices. The legislation would give people covered under other plans the benefit of the lower prices."

Voters Are Concerned that Congress Won't Go far Enough to Lower the Cost of Prescription Drugs

Which concerns you more?

Congress will not go far enough to lower the cost of prescription drugs and allow drug companies to continue charging excessive amounts that make medicines too expensive for many people.



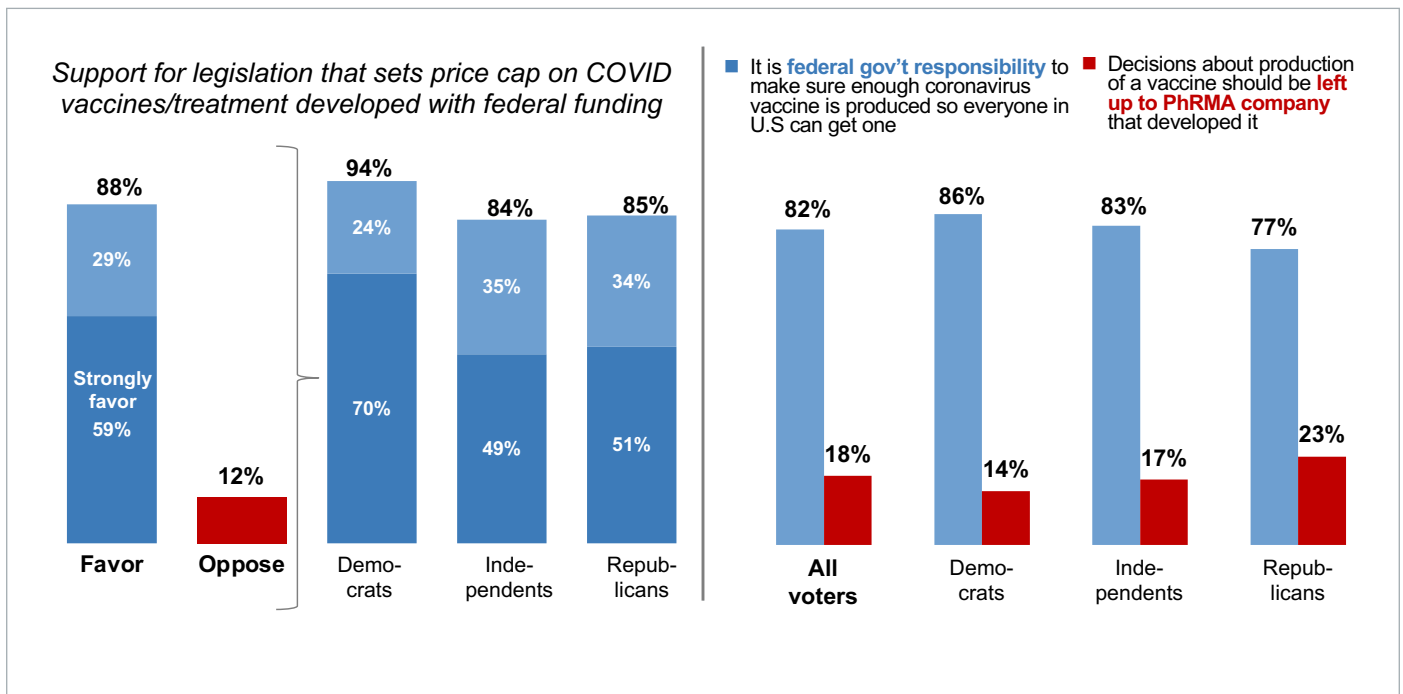
+38
CONGRESS
WON'T GO
FAR ENOUGH

Congress will go too far in regulating the cost of prescription drugs and reduce the ability of drug companies to invest in the research and development of new life-saving medicines.



	Won't go far enough	Will go too far
Democrats	80%	20%
Independents	70%	30%
Republicans	57%	43%
Undecided/third party for Congress	68%	32%
Rx costs difficult for me	77%	23%
Rx costs difficult for others/easy for me	72%	28%
Rx costs easy for all	48%	52%

There is Strong and Bipartisan Consensus that Congress Has a Responsibility to Make Sure that a Treatment or Vaccine for COVID-19 Is Both Affordable and Widely Available



Conclusion

A variety of solutions to the issues presented above have been floated in Congress and by the Trump administration but have yet to materialize. The findings presented here align closely with other surveys conducted both before and after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and with the devastating stories of families who have to make impossible trade-offs. The research shows that voters of all political beliefs urgently want Congress to put an end to excessively high drug pricing. Voters agree

that pharmaceutical companies charge too much for prescription drugs. Across political affiliation, age, and racial and ethnic groups, people want change, even if they aren't personally affected. Importantly, these findings suggest that respondents trust the government — not the pharmaceutical industry — to have their best interests at heart. This drumbeat is nothing short of a mandate for federal action on behalf of American consumers. Potential federal solutions can be found [here](#).

Endnotes

- ¹ Dan Witter. “50% in U.S. Fear Bankruptcy Due to Major Health Event,” *Gallup Wellbeing*, September 1, 2020, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/317948/fear-bankruptcy-due-major-health-event.aspx>
- ² Liz Szabo, “Pricey precision medicine often financially toxic for cancer patients,” *STAT Health*, November 1, 2018, <https://www.statnews.com/2018/11/01/precision-medicine-financially-toxic-cancer-patients/>
- ³ Lisa L. Gill, “The Shocking Rise of Prescription Drug Prices,” *Consumer Reports*, November 26, 2019, <https://www.consumerreports.org/drug-prices/the-shocking-rise-of-prescription-drug-prices/>
- ⁴ Dan Witters, “In U.S., Large Racial Divide in COVID-19 Cost Concerns,” *Gallup Politics*, July 29, 2020, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/316052/large-racial-divide-covid-cost-concerns.aspx>
- ⁵ Dan Witters, “Nine in 10 Concerned About Rising Drug Costs Due to COVID-19,” *Gallup Politics*, June 18, 2020, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/312641/nine-concerned-rising-drug-costs-due-covid.aspx>
- ⁶ National Alliance of Health Care Purchasers, “Pulse of the Purchaser Survey: Healthcare Strategy and Beyond, September 2020 Results,” <https://connect.nationalalliancehealth.org/viewdocument/pulse-of-the-purchaser-survey-heal>
- ⁷ Eric Sagonowsky, “AstraZeneca, Lilly, Sanofi and others raise prices to start July: report,” *Fierce Pharma*, July 8, 2020, <https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/astrazeneca-lilly-sanofi-and-other-companies-raise-prices-to-start-july-report>
- ⁸ Angus Liu, “Regeneron, Roche’s COVID-19 antibody cocktail could snare \$6B in sales next year: analyst,” *Fierce Pharma*, September 1, 2020, <https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/regeneron-roche-s-covid-19-antibody-cocktail-could-net-6b-sales-next-year-analyst>; <https://www.fiercepharma.com/pharma/gilead-buoyed-by-potential-remdesivir-covid-19-sales-elevates-2020-outlook-despite-weak-base>
- ⁹ Raven Gomez and Justin Mendoza, “State Lawmakers Can and Should Protect Consumers from Prescription Drug Price Gouging during COVID-10 and Beyond,” Families USA, August 2020, https://familiesusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/RX-177_States-Lawmakers-Should-Protect-Consumers-from-RX-Price-Gouging_Issue-Brief-1.pdf

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